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From musical genre to professional style:

a Bourdieusian perspective on musicians at work

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Introduction

For decades, idiomatic approach has framed the study of "popular" music and musicians: "rock", "jazz", "electro", "hip hop" etc. are too often unquestioned categories, seemingly obvious. Jazz musicians, rock musicians etc.

This approach by the musical genres tends to hide a more structural and fundamental opposition among the vast majority of musicians who are not rich or famous and struggle to make a living out of their musical activities, i.e. the "ordinary" musicians. Among them, some are playing music "on demand" (function musicians as Charles Umney would say (2016), close to service craftsmen) and some are playing their own "creation" (closer to the contemporary figure of the artist, expressing his or her singularity). We will show today why this social division of popular music space seems particularly relevant to us.

To get from "musical genre" to "professional styles" we use a Bourdieusian perspective on musical work, integrating the economy of symbolic goods which characterizes the more artistic part of the occupational space, and the individual social resources more or less adjusted to that regimen.

We also focus on the matching, the collaborations between musicians, as playing music as a professional (for money and in front of an audience) usually means working with other musicians.

Our main research question is there: How musical collaborations are framed? Is there only an idiomatic distribution of musical collaborations? What are the other factors which shape work matching in music?

1. Data: The "Musicians' Lives" survey

Our today presentation is based on a survey among musicians active in French-speaking Switzerland between 2012 and 2016, called "Musicians' LIVES".

We will present some of the result at the core at our book “Vivre de la musique ?” (“Make living with music?”) that we published in 2019 (2019).

Musicians are a “hard to reach” population”. Musicians don’t have a single and steady employment status, are accustomed to undeclared revenues, and work at night in entertainment places like bars, clubs, restaurants etc. So the occupational group boundaries are very hard to draw: there are no list, no repertoire of ordinary musicians, and the first issue for us was to circumscribe our population.

For this reason, we choose to build our own sample using a “snowball sampling”-like process (Bataille et al., 2018; Heckathorn and Jeffri, 2001). Indeed, the individuals defined as “musicians” by most of the people that we met during our fieldwork and former survey are foremost the ones who play and collaborate with other musicians – by playing in the same band or recording an album together. So, we decided to base our sampling strategy on a simple “relational” definition that makes sense for musicians: a musician is someone who is seen as such by his/her pairs, someone to contact to play with and who is embedded in a larger musical collaboration network.

We selected seven musicians (that we call “seeds” here). We have chosen them as different as possible, from the rockabilly wedding band singer to the arty contemporary pianist. We ask them to contact *themselves* three people with whom they had played for money during the last 12 months, and to ask them if they would agree to meet a member of our research team. Thus, we recruited 123 people (Fig. 1). Following our aim to challenge the “musical genre” approach, we don’t pay attention to the musical idiom they mostly play. We pay much attention to the fact that they make a living with music and to their employment condition.

Among this 123 musicians sample, we gathered information on their musical collaborations, the people with whom they played for three years, the type of repertoire they mostly play, their incomes (level and sources) and many others professional and socio-demographic information. Thanks to all the musical collaborations mentioned, we build a network of collaborations that give an overview of the French-speaking musicians professional space at the time of the data collection. People are vertex and collaborations are edges.

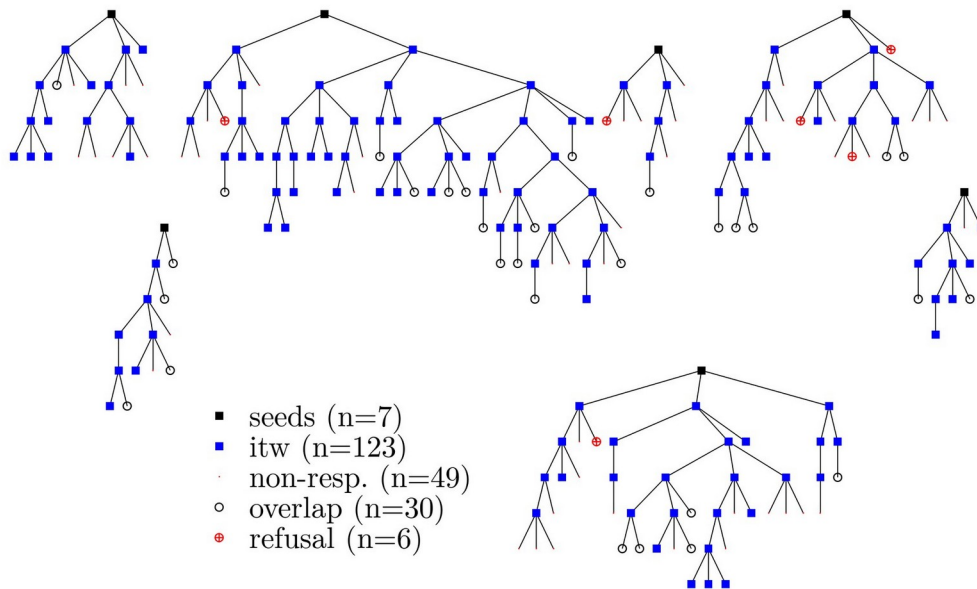


Figure 1: Recruitment trees

2. The need to collaborate to "make a living from music": a network with a single component

As we see here, this collaboration network is a single component network. There is a way to link every musicians directly or through one others (Fig. 2). The connectiveness of this network is to us a first important result: there is less "musical genre" based segmentation than expected regarding literature. There is a priori no specific "jazz musicians" network, "rock musicians network" etc... This point out that to make a living with music, musicians need to collaborate, beyond a priori aesthetic boundaries.

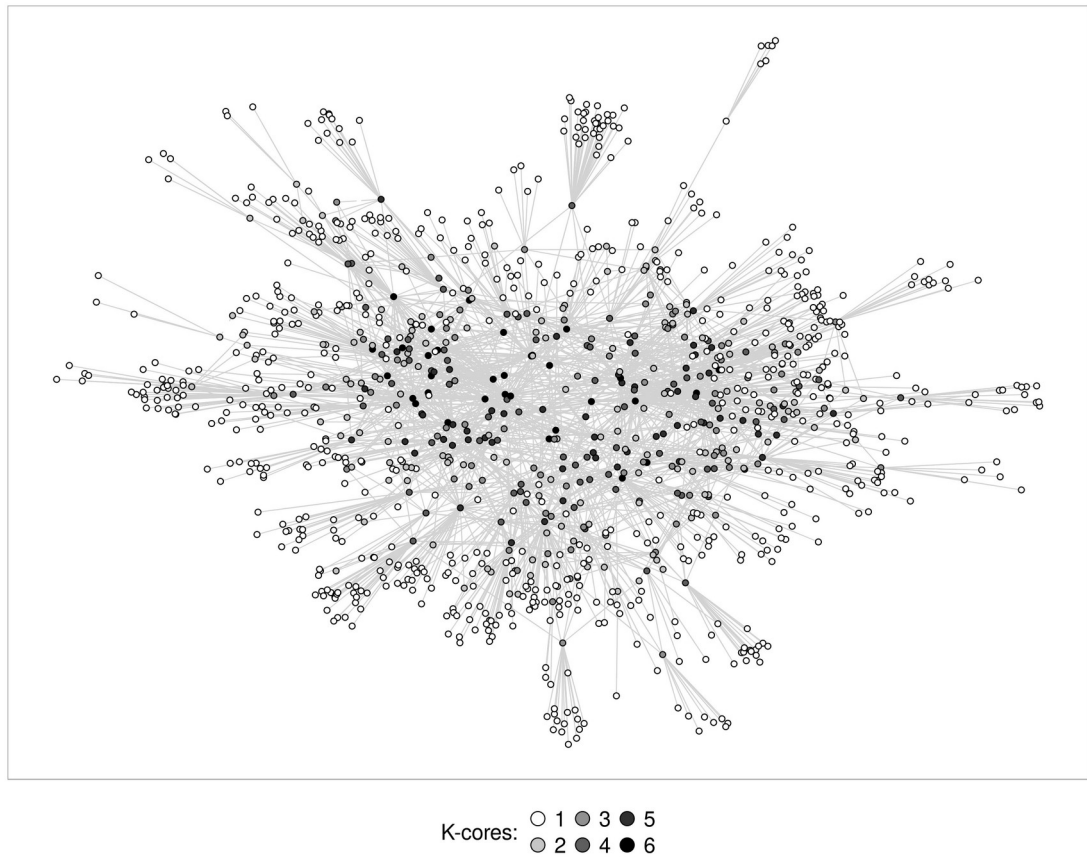


Figure 2: The collaborations network

Nevertheless, this collaboration network is structured. There is a core-group of integrated musicians, that are often cited as collaborators and more peripheral individuals. This peripheral individuals are “occasional musicians” but also foreigners that are less integrated in the French-speaking musicians network, even if they can be integrated in other networks. Because of this indetermined nature of peripheral musicians, we decided to focus on the core of our network, that is musicians who are at least cited twice.

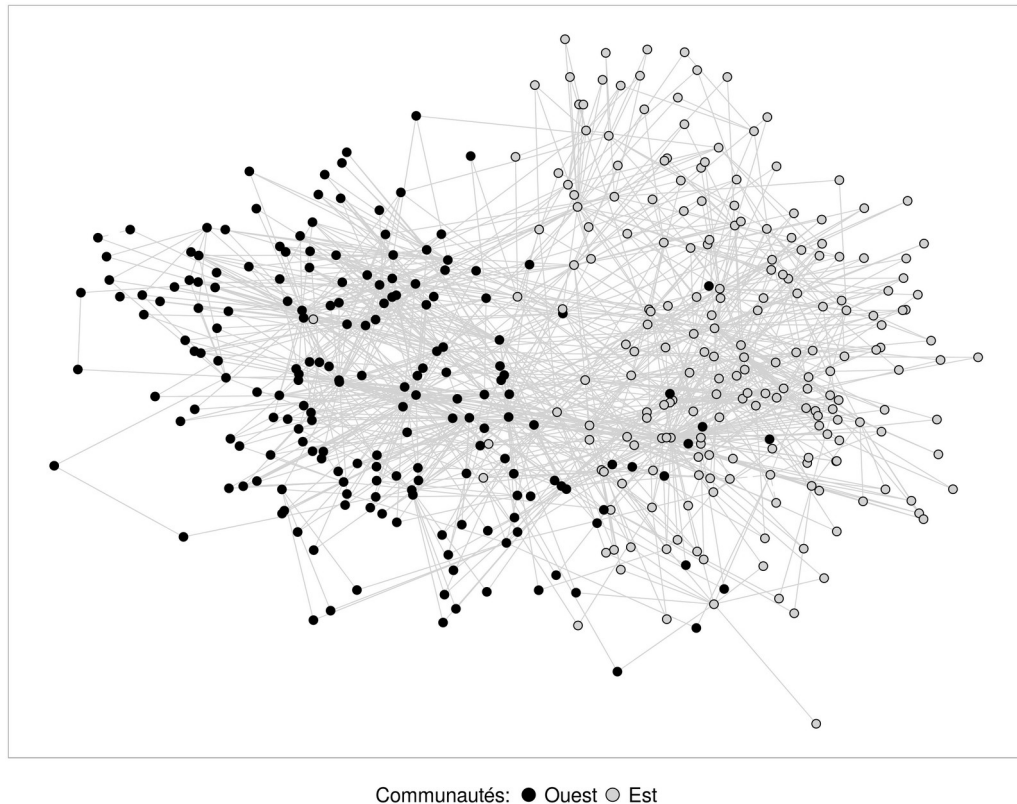


Figure 3: Two communities

3. Two communities at the core of the professional space

Trying to find a partition of this reduced collaboration networks, we ran a Spinglass algorithm. This cluster detection algorithm highlights that there is two main communities at the core of our musicians professional space (Figure 3).

They are of comparable size. One is located at the “West” of the graph. The other at the “East”. Looking at the socio-professional profile of our interviewees located in one or the other communities, we try to look at how musicians from the “West” and “East” communities differs.

4. A professional polarization

To do so, we ran several log linear models, where the dependent variable was being in the “West community” or not. As independent variable, we introduce two kinds of variables: one related to Musical genre; and one related to “Professional style”. Our aim was here to see how far musical genre inform professional relation once professional style is controlled.

Thus, we ran three models (Table 1). In Model 1, we only introduced variable on musical genre. In Model 2, we introduced only variable related to professional style. In Model 3, we introduced all the variables, to see the ones that are the more salient in our professional partition.

Variables	Modalités	Modèle 1		Modèle 2		Modèle 3	
		OR (e.s.)	sign.	OR (e.s.)	sign.	OR (e.s.)	sign.
Musical genre (multiple choice)	Chanson	1.57 (0.76)		-		1.43 (0.92)	
	Hip Hop	0.83 (0.42)		-		0.59 (0.46)	
	Jazz, Blues, Soul	0.54 (0.24)	*	-		0.57 (0.36)	
	Class. mus.	1.15 (0.54)		-		0.66 (0.46)	
	Contemp. mus.	1.14 (0.5)		-		1.07 (0.65)	
	World	2.31 (1.07)	*	-		7.86 (5.51)	**
	Electro	2.47 (1.12)	**	-		1.1 (0.79)	
	Radical impro.	1.3 (0.57)		-		1.63 (1.11)	
	Rock, Pop	0.45 (0.22)	*	-		0.66 (0.44)	
Total income (CHF, ref. <2000)	2000-4000	-		0.04 (0.07)	**	0.05 (0.08)	*
	4000-6000	-		0.79 (0.71)		0.69 (0.7)	
	More than 6000	-		0.29 (0.39)		0.24 (0.35)	
Musical income (CHF, ref. <2000)	2000-3999	-		27.84 (40.19)		19.05 (27.65)	
	4000 and more	-		5.07 (3.74)	**	8.22 (7.2)	***
Public funding (ref. No)	Yes	-		1.24 (0.78)		0.58 (0.44)	
Main répertoire	Compositions	-		2.37 (1.52)		7.19 (6.12)	**
	Compositions & standards	-		0.59 (0.42)		0.77 (0.64)	
	Covers	-		0.62 (0.48)		0.96 (0.85)	
	(ref. all)	-					
	Déviante résiduelle	156,1***		110,0*		97,2	

Table 1: Regression linear models

Looking at Model 1 results, we see that musical genre have a little influence. Musicians of the West community more often play “Electro” and “word music”. They also less often play “jazz” or “rock”.

Professional style significant variables are the level of global income, the level of musical incomes, to get a public funding, and the main repertoire musicians play. We see there that the interviewees having a musical income above 4000 Swiss Francs (approximately 3200 € at the time of the survey) had 5 time more chances to be in the West community than the East one.

In model 3, when all the variables are introduced, we see that musical genre variable have no salient influence with a control for professional style. The level of musical income is determinant in the community membership. And, more interestingly, with a control on musical genre, the repertoire seems determinant. Being pay for paying mostly its original creation is more common in the West community than in the East one. In other words, being an artist rather than a craftsman is a main opposition that frame the professional space polarization.

5. From professional style to social inequalities

We hope that it is not really surprising for most of you, but we have clear results showing that socio-economic determination is still massively at work to shape musicians’ careers as more or less artistic, creative, singular, or on the opposite marked by the needs of craft service providing.

Of course, people tend to pair with pairs, with musicians who share the same visions and the same divisions of the social and cultural world. That's what we see with the network displayed here, with these clouds (Fig. 4).

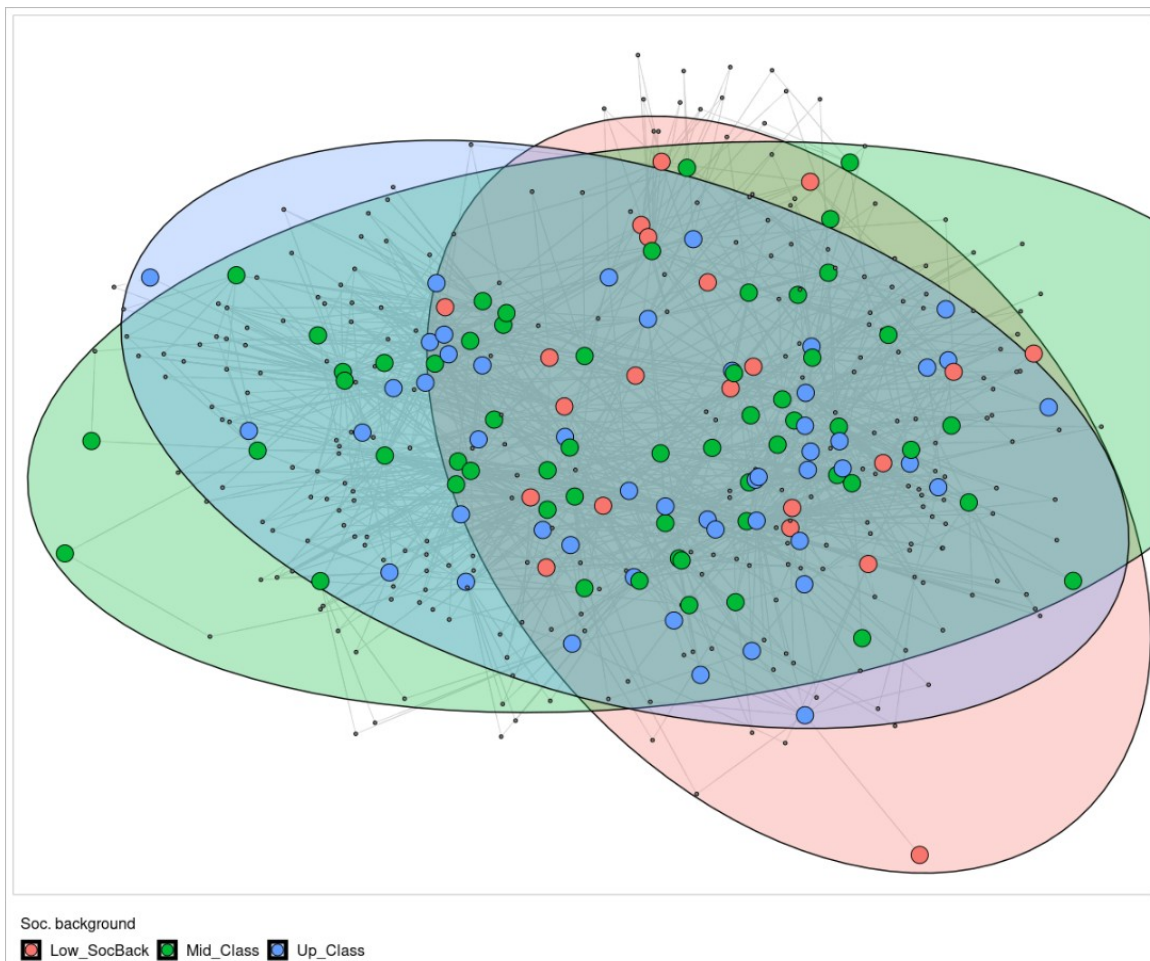


Figure 4: The social partition of the professional space

In the far West zone of the network, you can see that there are only children of the middle and upper classes, and it is the area of the network where people play only original compositions, the most “creative” part of the network. So, we have a real social border that overlaps the symbolic border between the more involved in the artistic career and the others. We can develop in the discussion if you want.

6. Conclusions

The matching logics found in our network analysis show a certain homogeneity among band members (resources, lifestyle, conception of music etc.), but also a homology of social style between the artists and the audience.

And it has not much to do with musical genre: creation vs reproduction (compositions vs covers), arts vs crafts (singular performance vs service providing), concerts venues with a listening audience vs animation gigs in which

nobody cares for the music... that bi-partitioning is crossing almost all the popular music styles and genres.

Social and professional style is more important than musical style, genre, or idiom to understand musical professional field. Last example: we both of us realized that we played in several venues in common with our respective bands around 2010, Pierre's band being in hardcore indie rock and Marc's in electro free jazz... We had the same kind of bandmates (technically good musicians mostly from middle and upper-middle class), the same kind of audience (mostly students or educated young people), in fact our bands were closer to each other than to a power rock band for Pierre or to a standard jazz combo for me.

Interesting also in the perspective of the New spirit of capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999) in a context of romanticisation of social precarity, in which entrepreneurial and managerial ideologies are nurtured by the model of artistic careers where everyone is supposed to freely express one's maximum potential and talent

Relevant perspective to understanding inequalities at work in "artistic professions" and beyond – since "creativity", "singularity", and "talent" are always more central in neoliberal ideology to value professional activities and individuals.

Crossing sociology of work and employment with Bourdieusian approach on symbolic domination is what we could call the symbolic economy of work, in line with Bourdieu's work (Bourdieu, 1977). That's the research program we're in for long and still continue to explore.

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